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INTERVIEWS WITH OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLARS ON LIVING PROBLEMS

For the purpose of giving to its readers a general view of the present state of biblical study in the United States, the *Biblical World* has requested several biblical scholars to return brief answers to a list of questions submitted to them. That the reader might have the advantage of a comparison of the views, divergent or concurrent, of different scholars, the same questions were submitted to all the scholars in a particular field. Two of the "written interviews" thus secured are published below.—*Editors.*

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR BEECHER

1. Define in a few words your point of view in biblical study.

I suppose that the question does not refer to the conclusions I have reached, but to the point of view I adopt at the outset of an investigation of the Bible and its contents.

All scholars alike would probably accept the principle that such an investigation is to be conducted solely by the examination of the phenomena—the facts in the case—without presuppositions drawn from other sources. It seems to me that some scholars, consciously or unconsciously, base their investigations on the presupposition that the Scriptures are uniquely inspired, and that others go on the presupposition that the Scriptures are not uniquely inspired. I try to avoid both these presuppositions. The second is as unscientific as the first, and lacks certain safeguards that attend the first.

What is thus true of any theory of inspiration, positive or negative, is equally true of any theory of biblical criticism or of comparative religion or of evolution. If one admits anything of this sort as a presupposition, his results are valid only for those who accept the same presupposition. All these alike, in their relations to the Bible, are dependent on the facts given in the Bible. To make the study of the Bible depend on them is to reason in a circle. It is a thing that should be done only in cases in which reasoning in a circle is legitimate. All alike are to be regarded as structures to be built

largely of materials quarried from the Scripture, and not as quarries whence materials for Scripture study may be dug.

The facts to be examined in Scripture study are first of all the Scriptures themselves as they exist. They constitute a great fact, presenting itself in numberless details. To this should be added all other matters of fact—fact as distinguished from theory or hypothesis—that concern the Scriptures, including prominently the facts furnished by exploration and by language study. On the whole, the matters of fact that have been most neglected, and that are therefore most in need of careful examination, are the statements made in the Scriptures.

Scripture statements of fact are not to be rejected without first taking the trouble to understand them, nor on grounds which we would object to if applied to statements which we ourselves might make.

To prevent misapprehension, let me add that I hold very positive convictions, as the result of my studies, on several matters that I refuse to entertain as presuppositions in the studies themselves, and in particular on the truthfulness and the unique inspiration of the Scriptures.

2. When did you adopt this point of view, and what was the decisive reason that might have occasioned the adopting of it?

I was brought up that way. The truth and the great importance of these principles of investigation were accentuated for me when I came to touch the current controversies over the higher criticism, by reason of the wholesale violation of them in books and articles which I read on the different sides of the different questions.

3. What were the greatest obstacles you have had to overcome in your work as scholar and teacher?

The chronic unwillingness of the human mind to take the trouble to understand the evidence in any given case, and settle the question purely on the evidence. The readiness instead to take sides, making the assumption, often groundless, that one of two opposing sides must be the right side. The readiness to defend the old because it is old, or the new because it is new, or the striking because it is striking. The readiness to settle a question by reading extensively and guessing at an average, rather than by legitimate study. The

habit of prematurely announcing the overthrow of received opinions, substituting for them opinions that turned out to be ephemeral.

4. In what respects has there been progress in biblical study within the period of your observance?

In the accumulation of material, archæological, geographical, grammatical, lexicological, etc.

In the understanding of Hebrew and Greek syntax.

In the recovery of the Assyrian and other oriental languages.

In the rendering of biblical materials accessible in many bibliothecas of various kinds. Books of reference are immeasurably richer than at the time when I began to observe, even though some of them are characterized by teachings that are transitional and ephemeral.

In the reaching of a common understanding in many matters of detail.

To a limited extent, in the recognition of the literary character of the Scriptures, as distinguished from the mechanical study of matters of literary detail.

To a limited extent and with qualifications, in pedagogical methods.

There is a *per contra* side, of which one of the largest items is the dying out of the habit of reading the Bible, and the consequent lessening of the familiarity of the public with its contents.

5. Will you mention some of the most important pending questions in Old Testament study?

The one supremely important question is that of the meaning of the contents of the Old Testament, as distinguished, on the one hand, from all deteriorated traditional meanings, and, on the other hand, from all feats of modern conjecture.

6. In what direction do you look for progress in the immediate future?

In the taking of an interest in the contents and the existing form of the Scriptures, in preference to less important matters.

7. To what extent is the church at large likely to accept the so-called modern critical view of the Bible?

The church has already accepted it to the extent of giving it hospitable treatment. As it contains nothing that is of any use to the church, I do not see how the church can go further.

8. What is your view of the *Bibel-Babel* controversy?

The things said by Professor Delitzsch before the emperor were not different from the things that men of his type have been constantly saying in print for many years. The incident seems to me principally significant as illustrating two points: First, by the right kind of advertising you can call public attention to anything. Second, when you call attention to a matter by advertising, the people who know something about it and the people who know nothing about it will be able to talk about it on nearly equal terms.

9. What do you regard as the relation of the Hammurabi code to the Mosaic code?

The question uses the term "Mosaic code" with some latitude. Supposing the Mosaic legislation to have been given by Moses, he of course made it largely a digest of usages that were already prevalent in Israel. If Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldees, these usages, or some of them, arose in the same civilization with the Hammurabi code. The question how far either drew from the other, or both from a common source, is as unimportant as it is unsolvable. In a relatively small area they treat of common subjects, and present resemblances and differences. The one significant fact is the immeasurable superiority of the Israelitish laws as a whole. It would be legitimate for an inspired writer to draw from Babylonian sources, if that suited his purpose.

10. What is your opinion of Cheyne's Jerahmeel hypothesis?

Some of Dr. Cheyne's critical and historical work seems to me in contrast with his remarkably fine literary work. His line of Jerahmeel conclusions does not seem to me particularly more wild than many of his other conclusions, or than some of the critical performances of some of the men who poke fun at Jerahmeel.

11. What do you think of Sayce's view of the bearing of archæological study on Old Testament study?

It is inadequate and unequal in its parts, but in a general way correct.

12. In your opinion, should the study of Hebrew be required or elective in the theological course?

Required, unless the entire course is made elective. But a man

otherwise well qualified should not be shut out of the ministry merely by his lack of Hebrew.

WILLIS J. BEECHER.

AUBURN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,
Auburn, N. Y.

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR MOORE

1. Define in a few words your point of view in biblical study.

My studies have been chiefly historical. I have tried to unite the philological and critical investigation of the sources with knowledge of tradition, of oriental history and archæology, and of the history of religions, and to employ the results constructively in accordance with established historical methods. On the fundamental critical problems of the Old Testament I hold the opinions which have prevailed among historical students in the last generation.

2. When did you adopt this point of view, and what was the decisive reason that might have occasioned the adopting of it?

My student years (from 1875 on) coincided with the advent of what was then the "new criticism." From the position of Ewald to that of Kuenen and Wellhausen the step was inevitable as soon as the so-called priestly stratum of the Hexateuch was more thoroughly examined, and compared with the best established facts in the religious history of Israel. Subsequent studies have made clearer the highly composite character of the legislation, and have led me to views about the development and transmission of the ritual and ceremonial laws differing somewhat widely from those which I formerly entertained.

3. What were the greatest obstacles you have had to overcome in your work as scholar and teacher?

I cannot say that I have ever been seriously hindered by anything except the limitations of my own knowledge and powers. I have always enjoyed the fullest freedom of learning and teaching.

4. In what respects has there been progress in biblical study within the period of your observation?

In the great enlargement of knowledge which has come through discovery and research in the East, especially in Babylonia; in the working out of many critical problems in the Old Testament; and

in the more thorough and sympathetic study of the literature and religion of the Jews from the Persian period on.

5. Will you mention some of the most important pending questions in Old Testament study?

The relation of Israelite civilization to that of other Semitic peoples; the history of the ritual and ceremonial law; the history of Judaism from the time of Alexander to that of the Antonines; the relation of early Christianity to Judaism

6. In what direction do you look for progress in the immediate future?

The condition of progress is a sounder apprehension of the true problems of the historian. In the past generation many students seem to have regarded the analysis and recovery of the sources as an end in itself, instead of a process strictly subsidiary to interpretation and construction. Some of the younger generation appear inclined to dissolve not only the Israelite legend but the history of the kingdoms into a phantasmagoria of Babylonian mythology. A second condition is a broader and more accurate learning, in which some of our most adventurous spirits are conspicuously lacking.

7. To what extent is the church at large likely to accept the so-called modern critical view of the Bible?

All that we can expect or desire the church at large to accept is the principle that the Bible, as an historical product, is to be interpreted by the historian in conformity with the methods of his art; and that only in this way can an historical understanding of the progress of religion be attained.

8. What is your view of the *Babel-Bibel* controversy?

That it is of no scientific interest.

9. What do you regard as the relation of the Hammurabi code to the Mosaic code?

In view of the known influence of Babylon on Canaanite civilization, and the adoption of Canaanite civilization by the Israelites, it is not improbable that certain parts of the Hebrew laws were indirectly dependent on Babylonian legislation. This dependence is hardly demonstrable in particulars, because the coincidences in content and expression are common to various other legislations in which Babylonian influence cannot be suspected.

10. What is your opinion of Cheyne's Jerahmeel hypothesis?

That it violates every possible principle of philological and historical method.

11. What do you think of Sayce's view of the bearing of archæological study in Old Testament study?

The historian welcomes all evidence, of every kind and from every quarter, that bears directly or indirectly upon his subject; and is bound to give it the more careful consideration if it seems to conflict with his previous opinions or hypotheses. To the smallest bit of solid fact the most imposing theory must cede. There is no controversy about the general principle. But Professor Sayce's interpretations and combinations of monumental or archæological evidence are not facts—though he often seems to think so. They are only his theories, good or bad, and as such have no other authority than their intrinsic probability.

12. In your opinion, should the study of Hebrew be required or elective in the Theological course?

I do not think it is wise to require Hebrew of all students of theology. Many men would undoubtedly spend their time to more profit on the contents of the Old Testament than on its original language.

GEORGE F. MOORE.

DIVINITY SCHOOL OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY,
Cambridge, Mass.